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Cuba and the Campaign

Campaigns may settle elections, but campaign oratory unsettles politics long after the votes have been counted. There may have been an honest misunderstanding about whether President Kennedy was told the details of the Central Intelligence Agency's invasion preparations, but it can also be maintained that neither candidate was wholly beyond reproach in handling the delicate subject of Cuba during the campaign. Both responded to the pressures of the moment—and perhaps that is the nature of warmly-contested campaigns.

On Oct. 22, Vice President Nixon accused Mr. Kennedy of advancing a "shockingly reckless" proposal that could set off World War III. The proposal was Mr. Kennedy's suggestion that the United States attempt to strengthen the non-Batista democratic forces in exile and in Cuba itself. But privately, Mr. Nixon was urging the very same course;

if the policy constituted such a grievous error, Mr. Nixon should have been consistent. He cannot have it both ways.

The former Vice President contends, in his book *Six Crises*, that he felt Mr. Kennedy was taking advantage of secret briefings to urge publicly a course that the United States was following covertly. Mr. Nixon says he felt impelled to attack the policy to avoid giving away the CIA plan. But it is also true that Mr. Nixon, in the last of the four "Great Debates," said in reference to Cuba, "We can do what we did with Guatemala." In a slightly more discreet way, Mr. Nixon was really saying that the United States should assist an invasion of Cuba. Both candidates, in short, could be accused of tipping off Fidel Castro.

What pains the former Vice President is that his campaign oratory made him seem "softer" on Castro than Mr. Kennedy. Surely this is the heart of the matter. In the heat of the campaign, both candidates were more worried about seeming "soft" on Castro than about advocating a sensible and realistic policy toward Cuba. It is the nature of political campaigns to bring out the huckster in the best of men; this is a problem any democracy faces in conducting a foreign policy during an election.

Confronted with a similar problem, Franklin Roosevelt once asked an aide what could be done about justifying a campaign speech, promising to balance the budget. "Deny you ever made the speech," Mr. Roosevelt was advised. This might be wise counsel for the two contenders in 1960, who both dwell in glass houses as far as Cuba is concerned.